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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002935

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [PTER](#) [YE](#) [SO](#) [SU](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: PM MELES URGES ACTION ON SUDAN, NON-COMMITTAL ON
LEAHY VETTING CONCERNS

REF: ADDIS ABABA 2817

Classified By: CDA Tulinabo Mushingi for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Prime Minister Meles told visiting DASD Ambassador Huddleston that there is a "complete coincidence of vital security interests" between the U.S. and Ethiopia. He agreed to discuss the issue of Leahy vetting with military commanders, but did not agree to any specific action. Meles described Sudan as Ethiopia's greatest security concern, stressed that an implosion in Sudan will have repercussions across the continent, and urged aggressive U.S. action to ensure a peaceful separation of the south from the north. Meles raised Yemen as a major security concern, and offered to cooperate with the U.S. to ensure stability there. On Somalia, Meles said the Islamist movement has been weakened by divisions that will not likely be repaired, but cautioned that it is now serving as a front for foreign actors. Meles said he is encouraging the Somali government to form an alliance with an increasingly strong "grass-roots" Sufi movement, and attempting to reassure that movement that it can trust President Sharif. End summary.

2. (SBU) Visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa Ambassador Vicki Huddleston and CDA Tulinabo Mushingi met with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on December 10 for 90 minutes. Meles was joined by Special Assistant Gebretensae Gebremichael. The U.S. was also represented by Brigadier Gen. Wallace Farris of the Joint Staff, U.S. Defense Attache Col. Bradley Anderson, Col. Saul Bracero, and PolOff.

Security Relationship Vital, Non-Committal on Leahy Vetting

3. (C) Prime Minister Meles told Amb. Huddleston that there is a "complete coincidence of vital security interests" between the U.S. and Ethiopia, and the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) will continue to work cooperatively with the U.S. to address these mutual interests. Meles described Ethiopia's long history of dealing with insecurity exported from the middle east, from the fall of the Axumite Empire during the Islamic revivalist movement to the current "nightmare of jihad," and said Ethiopia cannot withstand this tide of fundamentalism and extremism without international support, and U.S. support in particular. Meles reiterated several times that "at every step, we want to contribute our fair share, and not ask for assistance when we can do things on

our own."

¶4. (C) Emphasizing the importance of the U.S.-Ethiopia security relationship, Amb. Huddleston expressed concern that disagreement over Leahy vetting requirements would impede the increased levels of cooperation proposed during the November 5 bilateral talks. She explained that U.S.-provided military equipment valued at some USD 30 million was backlogged as a result of the Ethiopian National Defense Force's (ENDF) refusal to provide sufficient information to complete Leahy Vetting. Amb. Huddleston conceded that the USG had changed its position on Leahy Vetting requirements, but emphasized that the GoE's position had changed as well, referencing the ENDF engineering battalion intended to receive much of the backlogged equipment, which to date has not been established.

¶5. (C) Meles emphasized that the ENDF would continue to cooperate with the U.S. military because of its underlying strategic priorities, and "not receiving assistance will not affect in any way our cooperative strategic and intelligence relationship." Naturally, the ENDF wants foreign assistance to fill gaps in its capabilities, but in the past when the ENDF has not been able to procure equipment from the U.S., it has been able to procure it elsewhere. Meles explained that while the ENDF would "dearly love" the equipment currently in Djibouti, his commanders were "puzzled" by U.S. procedures, and perhaps both sides were too entrenched in their positions. He further stated that the ENDF needed to "understand how the American system works," and agreed to further discuss the issue with his commanders to find a way

ADDIS ABAB 00002935 002 OF 003

forward. Meles said, "We will seek to find a resolution."

GoE Fears Sudan Implosion, Urges Aggressive U.S. Action

¶6. (C) Meles explained that Ethiopia feared an implosion in Sudan, and said the destabilizing effect this would have "from Djibouti to Dakar" was Ethiopia's greatest security concern. The chance for a united Sudan has expired, and all concerned parties must now focus on achieving an "organized divorce" of the south from the north. Without strong leadership in the south, it would be extremely difficult to pull this off. Meles reiterated that if southerners vote in a referendum, "there is no doubt in my mind they will vote for secession." The north may exploit the vacuum of leadership in the south to pit various groups against each other in an effort to destabilize the region. However, elements in the south are aware of this, and will attempt to destabilize the north in a similar manner. Meles emphasized that a north-south conflict, combined with intra-regional conflicts in both the north and south, is entirely possible, and in such an event the possibility of a complete implosion with impact across Africa is very real.

¶7. (C) Meles described Special Envoy Gen. Gration's work as "the light at the end of the tunnel," and stressed that "we must act before 2011." He stated that the south must be willing to make concessions on oil and other issues, and the north must be made to realize that it cannot hold onto the south by force. The U.S. must be actively and aggressively involved, but "it can pull this off, as it pulled off the CPA." He reiterated that Khartoum badly wants to normalize relations with the U.S., and the U.S. holds the trump card and can use it to leverage a north-south peace. Meles stated that the AU strategy has the highest chance of success, and urged the U.S. to support it. He emphasized the need to move beyond exploratory talks, noting that AU panel members hold Gen. Gration in high esteem and are prepared to work with him.

Conflict in Yemen a Major Concern

¶18. (C) Meles raised Yemen, describing it as a key part of Ethiopia's security environment and adding that insecurity there affects the country more than conflict in many African countries. He described conflict in Yemen as a "major concern" for Ethiopia, referencing both the northern Huthi conflict and insecurity in the south. Meles urged the U.S. to pay close attention to Yemen and the impact it has on Africa, and offered that Ethiopia would work with the U.S. "and contribute every resource we can" to ensure stability there. (Note: In the past month, GoE officials have raised Yemen with USG interlocutors with increasing frequency. End note.)

Somali Islamists Divided, but TFG Lacks Resources, Allies

¶19. (C) Describing Somalia as "a challenge we live with," Meles assessed that divisions between al-Shabaab and Hizb-al-Islam "are very unlikely to be patched up," and this would weaken the Islamist movement in Somalia. He attributed this fracture to clan politics, ideological differences, and conflict over resources.

¶10. (C) Discussing al Sunnah wal Jama'a (ASWJ), Meles pointed out that anti-Islamist sentiment among Sufi Muslims had surged as a result of the desecration of Sufi holy cites by extremist groups, and described the "grass-roots level rebellion" of "tolerant, traditional" Sufis against "an invading ideology" as a very positive development.

¶11. (C) Meles stated that al-Shabaab is increasingly serving as a front for foreign actors. As its leaders have been weakened, almost every clan has provided cover for international jihadists. Meles lamented that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was not prepared to combat the Islamist front, and had not sufficiently partnered with the Sufi movement. While some Sufis suspect that TFG President Sheikh Sharif is a Wahhabi, Meles believes "he

ADDIS ABAB 00002935 003 OF 003

stands for peace," and has attempted to convince Sufi leaders that they can trust Sharif. Meles is encouraging the TFG to develop a strong alliance with ASWJ, and believes that if they do, the Islamist movement will become further marginalized. He noted that change will not come quickly, and "the Islamists are more serious than we previously thought." Meles praised the U.S. for its financial support of the TFG, but added that an overall lack of resources was limiting it. When the GoE offered to provide training to TFG forces, it was told the TFG did not have resources to send forces to Ethiopia - a response Meles found "odd." He reported Sharif is seeking financial support from Saudi Arabia, and he believed Sharif would be successful in this effort "as a result of his previous experience."

¶12. (U) This message has been cleared by Ambassador Huddleston.
MUSHINGI